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Exposure of CIA agents is assailed

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By Robert Furlow
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a polite dispute over dangerous secrets, former CIA director William Colby strongly disagreed yesterday with magazine editors who detail CIA operations and identify agents.

Colby compared exposure of agents on risky undercover assignments to soldiers "being shot in the back by fellow Americans."

William H. Schaap, co-editor of the Covert Action Information Bulletin, said that magazine's naming of names has brought physical harm to no agent. He said the editors' motive is only "exposing what we view as the abuses" by the CIA.

Both Schaap and Rep. Romano Mazzoli (D., Ky.), chairman of a House Intelligence subcommittee that heard the testimony, characterized it as "profound disagreement," but no harsh words were exchanged.

The panel is considering various bills that call for the imprisonment or fining of people who publicly identify U.S. foreign agents or their secret informants.

There is wide support for the bills' provisions to penalize disclosure by anyone who uses his formal access to classified documents to identify an agent.

However, the Justice Department opposes another provision of the version that the full House Intelligence Committee backs, saying it might violate constitutional guarantees of free speech through its penalties for private citizens using public information to name a CIA agent.

Asked by Mazzoli whether supporters of the bills "are overplaying"

possible dangers in identification of agents, Colby replied, "I don't think so."

Whether or not past identifications actually have led to physical harm, he said, "people are scared... people don't want to go to a dangerous assignment where there are known terrorists out there and then have their names revealed."

Schaap said he knew of no instance in which publication of an agent's name had led to physical harm, and he added that if such harm had occurred, "the CIA would have immediately called a press conference and we would know about it."

Colby did not directly assert that any agent has been harmed as a clear result of public identification, but he cited various publications' identification of Richard Welch, former CIA station chief in Athens, as one cause

leading to the slaying of Welch in 1975.

Schaap said he and others with his publication have no objection to straight intelligence-gathering by the CIA or other intelligence agencies.

But he added, "We believe that the covert manipulation for which the CIA has become notorious — undercover officers and agents corrupting and bribing officials, buying elections... all the way to bombings and assassinations — that this manipulation does not strengthen democracy here in the United States but in fact weakens it."

In that light, he said, his magazine concentrates on exposing what we view as the abuses of the Western intelligence agencies, primarily the CIA... and exposing the people responsible for those abuses."

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